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ABSTRACT

The External Diploma Program (EDP) of the American Council on Education is an applied-performance, competency-based assessment program that provides credentials to skilled adults who have acquired their high-school-level abilities through their life experience. Through the EDP mature adults can do the following: demonstrate their abilities in a series of simulations that parallel job and life situations; be evaluated against established criteria of performance instead of by comparison with others; take responsibility for acquiring instruction through existing community resources; and demonstrate mastery of all the competencies required, including an occupational or specialized skill, without stepping inside a classroom. Outcomes were originally determined through a task force consensus model, through which a group of business, labor, education, and government representatives agreed on life skill competencies. The outcomes have been updated periodically as new competencies have become necessary. Consistency and stability of the ratings are constantly monitored to ensure reliability. The portfolio assessment has been kept cost effective because there is no instructional component, recordkeeping has been streamlined, new instructional programs are not designed, assessments can be delivered at work sites, and raters meet frequently to build consensus. The EDP system has the following characteristics: (1) documents outcomes; (2) includes multiple modes of demonstration; (3) is a high-stakes assessment; (4) contains safeguards; (5) is valid; (6) is reliable; (7) has quality controls; and (8) can be cost effective. (KC)

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IMPLEMENTING APPLIED PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT:

The External Diploma Program EDP:

PROFILE OF A MATURE, HIGH STAKES, LARGE SCALE, APPLIED-PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

Presented by:
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at AAACE Conference, Dallas, Texas
November, 1993

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WHAT IS THE EXTERNAL DIPLOMA PROGRAM (EDP) ASSESSMENT SYSTEM?

The External Diploma Program (EDP) is an applied-performance, competency-based assessment program that credentials skilled adults who have acquired their high school level abilities through their life experience. The EDP allows mature adults to demonstrate their abilities in a series of simulations that parallel job and life situations; to be evaluated against an established criteria of performance instead of by comparison with others; to take responsibility for acquiring instruction through existing community resources; and, finally, to demonstrate mastery of all the competencies required, including an occupational or specialized skill, without stepping inside a classroom.

The skills and competencies demonstrated through the EDP assessment process are those needed by a competent citizen functioning in the modern world. Many of the 65 competencies parallel those expected of a skilled employee as determined by the WORKFORCE 2000 and SCANS research. Local school boards and state departments of education review the EDP competencies, agreeing to award a traditional diploma to adults who complete the EDP process with 100% mastery. The American Council on Education trains, evaluates and certifies EDP assessors and monitors the administration of this nationwide applied-performance assessment process.

Before an adult can begin documenting her or his learning at the high school level, basic skills in reading, writing and math must be demonstrated through diagnostic testing conducted in a series of office visits. Specific skills needing remediation are reported to the adult in written and oral feedback. EDP has no instructional component; however, adults in need of instruction are referred to existing educational resources. Once the basic skill competence is demonstrated, the adult can begin the EDP high school level assessment.

At this stage, the 65 competencies are embedded in a series of life skill tasks that the candidate completes independently, using resources in the community. The candidate then demonstrates many of the same competencies again in a second simulation or a structured interview conducted in a closed assessment setting. The EDP assessor evaluates the clients' answers according to the national criteria contained in the program's manuals. Any item not demonstrated on the first try is reported to the candidate, who then seeks help on her or his own and attempts the demonstration again. All items demonstrated are compiled in a portfolio of evidence; those not demonstrated must be learned and attempted again, until all 65 competencies are demonstrated correctly. At the end of the process the adult has compiled a portfolio that represents all 65 competencies which have been demonstrated successfully. That final portfolio is completely reviewed by a second assessor, according to the manual criteria.

HISTORY OF EDP, ACE AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS IN MEASURING THE OUTCOMES OF ADULT LEARNING

ACE, through the Center for Adult Learning and Educational Credentials, has a 50-year history of assessing and evaluating the outcomes of learning acquired by adults from a variety of educational experiences. ACE recommends to colleges and universities credit guidelines for business and industry training courses, learning acquired through the military, and credit by examination. GEDTS also asks the adult learner to demonstrate competency acquired extra-institutionally. Besides ACE's newly updated EDP (the "other high school assessment option"), other models of alternative assessment have been used in large-scale testing situations, ranging from the highly visible certification for professions (such as nursing); to the GEDTS essay recently added to the multiple choice Writing Skills test; to CAEL models for college portfolios for adults with acquired learning outside of school; to Toyota's assessment system for promotion and employment in its Georgetown, KY plant.

EDP: HOW THE OUTCOMES WERE DETERMINED

The first step in designing any assessment system (or any good instructional system, for that matter) is to establish the outcomes to be measured (or taught). Who says what is taught and thus what is measured is always an issue, and once again the design of the outcomes traditionally follows the purpose of the assessment. If you wish to measure the skills of a plumber or a doctor, the field is often asked to set the test specifications, because the outcomes expected of a good practitioner are best described by persons specializing in that discipline. If a business or union pays for the instruction, they set the learning desired and describe what they want their employees to do with the learning after it has been achieved. These outcomes become both the instructional goals and the evaluation criteria.

For high stakes certification outcomes cannot be decided subjectively by one teacher or expert, but rather must be determined through a consensus on the body of knowledge and skills that the learner, program, teacher, or world expects of a successful adult functioning in that particular task.

To establish the original EDP competencies (those necessary for an adult functioning at the level of a competent high school graduate in the world), the original New York designers of the EDP alternative assessment system used a task force consensus model with members from business, labor, higher education, secondary education, and government. In 1973, this group generated a list of more than 100 generalized competencies of life skills needed by competent adults (functioning at the level of a high school graduate) to cope in society.

A group of 38 educators then rated the 100 life-skill competencies to prioritize, level, and clarify them. Some competencies were found to be repetitive, nonessential, or more sophisticated than the skill level required of a high school graduate functioning successfully in society. Those competencies were eliminated and the group produced a final list of 64 life-skill competencies within seven generic theme areas.

It was also determined that each adult would be required to demonstrate competence in one of three individual areas:

- Skill in an occupational or vocational area, *OR*
- Skill in an advanced academic area, *OR*
- Skill in a specialized area, such as art or home management.

In 1991 ACE reviewed and revised the original competencies using a consensus group involving representative employers, union leaders, community leaders, adult teachers, and secondary school principals. The suggested list was compared with the WORKFORCE 2000 competencies, speculating about what a competent worker of the 21st century will need. Academic subject matter experts (writing, reading, math) and life skill experts (American Red Cross, American Bar Association, USDA, Planned Parenthood, and others) reviewed the materials. Before each new implementation of the EDP, the new 65 EDP competencies are reviewed by local school boards. To date, more than 40 school boards have reviewed the competencies and agreed to award the diploma for demonstration of these competencies. The competencies have been further reviewed and accepted as more than sufficient by several EDP partners representing large companies, labor unions, and small business organizations.

To document the learning claimed by the student, EDP includes a variety of non-traditional modes of demonstration: oral, written, applied performance, documentation, and simulations. The EDP demands a 100% mastery of all competencies, but allows for the adult to self-pace the learning and the demonstration of that learning. Parts of the assessment (called "tasks") are done at home and parts (called "spot check/interviews") are assessed in a series of private office visits. The criteria

both of what is acceptable evidence and the level of skill demanded are outlined in standardized manuals and in the directions to the candidate. The burden for compiling most of the evidence is placed on the candidate.

EDP: HOW THE SAFEGUARDS NECESSARY FOR HIGH STAKES TESTING WERE ACHIEVED

To insure reliability of the alternative assessment in any high stakes situation demands clearly stated criteria that can be administered objectively and universally. In a high stakes certification process such as one that issues a high school diploma, vigilance is needed to maintain a consistency and objectivity in evaluation among raters. In the case of the EDP, portfolios are first reviewed against nationally established criteria, by raters known as assessors who are trained and certified by ACE. Each assessor's evaluation of the complete demonstration of the 65 competencies is completely evaluated a second time by another assessor before the diploma is awarded. ACE has built in procedures for assessors to monitor their own evaluations to insure consistency at each local program level. At the end of the first year of implementation and periodically thereafter ACE conducts an inter-rater reliability check, with feedback, to monitor state-wide and nation-wide consistency and stability among raters.

EDP: ACHIEVING COST EFFECTIVENESS

Cost effectiveness in all portfolio assessment and alternative assessment processes is always a concern. EDP was designed to combine the highest level of assessment reliability with the most efficient use of staff time. This was achieved in several ways:

1. EDP is strictly an assessment system; there is no instructional component. Since the major burden of learning is placed on the student and achieved outside the teacher's contact hours, the agency pays only for staff time used for administering and evaluating the assessment, not for learning time. Approximately 30 hours of staff time per graduate is required for administering and evaluating the assessment once a staff person completes the first cycle of training. At $20 per hour of staff time, this makes staffing cost per graduate approximately $600.00. In addition, materials per graduate cost $50. Since the average grade completed for most EDP grads is 10th grade, the same graduate attending class in an adult high school would take an estimated 10 more classes to graduate and would cost approximately $1080.00 a grad (with 20 persons in a class, at approximately 108 hours per class, teacher paid $20 an hour).

2. The recordkeeping and feedback sheets (often a high cost item in a self-paced, competency based model) is streamlined by means of checklists.

3. No need exists for new instructional programs to be designed. New clients are led to existing programs, including community services such as libraries, book stores, and television.

4. Partnerships can be facilitated as assessment can easily be delivered at members' sites, with part of the staffing and material costs picked up by businesses, labor, PICS, and other partners. Staffing can be part-time hourly.

5. Inter-rater reliability is designed as an integral part of the local site's procedures:
   - Training and evaluation are combined in the same up-front costs; the evaluation workshop is designed to turn the monitoring over to the local site director.
   - Portfolio reviewers (every portfolio reviewed by a second assessor) trained to become the "eyes of ACE."
   - Consensus moderation (achieved by staff meetings) is built-in to achieve a continuous training model.

SELECT CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EXTERNAL DIPLOMA PROGRAM (EDP) AS AN ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

EDP DOCUMENTS OUTCOMES RATHER THAN INPUT

- focused on what is learned rather than what is taught
- documented according to standard criteria shared with the learner
- evaluated according to standard criteria (criterion-referenced)
- includes credit for prior learning

EDP INCLUDES MULTIPLE MODES OF DEMONSTRATION: observations, written and oral demonstrations, structured interviews, simulations, projects, documentation

- demonstration mode appropriate to the specific skill being measured
- inclusion of various learning style strengths
- specific feedback and resource information shared with the learner
- unlimited opportunities to demonstrate skills
- no time barriers, unless relevant to demonstration of specific skill
- many opportunities for the adult to present her or his own situational examples

EDP IS A HIGH STAKES ASSESSMENT

A high stakes assessment is any assessment or testing system that selects or screens persons by means of this test or demands accountability from programs awarded funding

- educational credentials
- license
- personnel tests: hiring or promotion
- professional certification
- vocational certification
- accountability

WHAT ARE NECESSARY SAFEGUARDS FOR ASSESSMENT IN A HIGH-STAKES SITUATION?

- Validity of the measures
- Reliability among raters
- Same opportunity for all (no bias to race, gender, ethnicity, etc.)
- Reliability and transferability of the results

EDP IS VALID

- reflects the reality of the job, some external standard, or a definition of what the outcomes are expected to describe
- includes relevant and significant abilities an adult is expected to demonstrate under the above
- no bias to race, gender, ethnicity, etc.

HOW TO ACHIEVE IT:

- determined through a consensus process of users or practitioners
- agreement to standards by users or practitioners

EDP IS RELIABLE

- raters use the same standards and criteria for acceptable performance
- raters consistently interpret the criteria in the same way
- in judgmental calls there is a consistent process for reaching consensus
- raters stay reliable over time and administrations

HOW TO ACHIEVE IT:

- consistent staff training and follow-up training opportunities
- monitoring of assessment procedures by an organization of repute concerned with quality
- restriction on the use of assessment instruments to trained staff
- no permission to alter instruments
- consensus moderation
- inter-rater reliability monitoring over time

EDP HAS QUALITY CONTROLS

- reliable agency
- monitoring and systematic checks on raters
- standardized and unbiased procedures for administration, scoring, and giving feedback

HOW TO ACHIEVE IT:

- local, as well as national, monitoring
- on-going training and training the trainers
- double or cross checks among assessors

EDP: APPLIED PERFORMANCE/PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT CAN BE COST EFFECTIVE

EDP is more cost effective than "seat-time options,"since the average grade completed for most EDP clients is 10th grade. Classes requiring 108 hours X 10 classes/ 18 students per class (60 hours per grad X teacher's salary $20= $1200.00 per grad.) EDP (same salary of $20 for assessor) X 30 hours staff time per graduate=$600.00 per grad.

HOW TO ACHIEVE IT:

- high performance staffing roles, no down time; assessors time always productive: appointment part independent, part interview, part time for evaluating tasks; trained for all roles.

- short-cuts for recordkeeping: using self-assessing and checklists to report and to keep records.

- more time spent on learning by the candidate than the teacher; system only pays for contact hours with the staff

- uses existing learning opportunities, including training

- goal of final training and evaluation is for self-sufficiency and to train sites to monitor themselves; sporadic checks done by mail.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEWING ASSESSMENTS

IS MY ASSESSMENT HIGH STAKES?

___ does it issue an educational credential?
___ does it determine who goes on to college or to further educational opportunities?
___ does it issue an license?
___ is it used for hiring or promotion?
___ does it issue a professional certification?
___ does it issue a vocational certification?
___ does it effect my funding?

SAFEGUARDS FOR THE ASSESSMENT :

___ Consistent staff training?
___ Follow-up training opportunities?
___ Same opportunity for all (no bias to race, gender, ethnicity, etc)?
___ Reliability among raters?
___ Inter-rater reliability monitoring?
___ Restriction on the use of assessment instruments to trained staff?
___ No permission to alter instruments?
___ Reliability and transferability of the results?
___ Monitoring of assessment procedures by an organization of repute concerned with quality?

IS THE ASSESSMENT VALID?

___ outcomes determined through a consensus process of users or practitioners
___agreement to standards or outcomes by users or practitioners
___reflects some external standard or a definition of what the outcomes are
___ no bias to race, gender, ethnicity, etc.

IS THE ASSESSMENT RELIABLE?

___ raters use the same standards and criteria for acceptable performance?
___ raters consistently interpret the criteria in the same way?
___ in judgmental calls is there a consistent process for reaching consensus?
___ do raters stay reliable over time and administrations?

ARE THERE QUALITY CONTROLS ?

___ reliable agency
___ monitoring and occasional checks on raters
___ standard systematic and unbiased procedures for administration, scoring, and giving feedback

HOW CAN YOU MAKE THE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM MORE COST EFFECTIVE?

___ Time and duties of staff (high performance staffing roles)
___ Recordkeeping
___ Training for self-sufficiency
___ Learner does more work than the teacher/assessor
___ Use external existing opportunities (don't re-invent the wheel)